

Peattie, Roderick

Convocation address, December, 1935

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December

## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

December, 1935  
Roderick Peattie  
Department of Geography

When I graduated from college, more years ago than I care to admit, a commencement address was given by a learned gentleman upon The History of the German Empire. The hot June sun, the erudition of the speaker and the duration of the address conspired to give me a dislike for German history which still lives. I am not going to be erudite (for reasons quite personal), and I am going to be brief. Moreover, I am not delivering my little oration for the benefit of the faculty or the parents. I am talking informally to you, the graduates, and particularly to those receiving their first degree.

The moment of attainment is a time for a consideration of the value of that attainment. You are today receiving your degree. Has it been worth the effort? Of what use shall be your learning? Those who have graduated with special techniques of use in professional life are today not doubting the value of having learned those techniques. The facts and methods of the Engineering, Education, Commerce colleges and of the Professional Schools are, of course, of certain value. Even those students, however, have been required to take general cultural courses, and other students have had the advantages of four years of purely non-professional training as found in the College of Arts. Aside, then, from being an asylum where one may more or less painlessly grow up, is a college devoted largely to cultural education worth while? You will find those who say that it is not. It is a familiar



statement that leaders are born great and that they succeed in spite of formal education. And it is added, we need few leaders. Both statements are more or less true and yet too few people are college trained. We must look upon higher education in the light of values other than dollars and cents or values of leadership. The true value of college life is to be measured by the intellectual development achieved in the mass of its students.

It is a truism to say that <sup>the best</sup> ~~all~~ education is self-education and yet the faculty must not disclaim all responsibility. It is hoped that the faculty has taught you to think, that is, to undergo the intellectual process. We do not hope that the facts we have taught will stay by you. Many of them are of little importance except as they were used in developing within you the intellectual processes. Indeed our low evaluation upon any single group of facts is evidenced when to one of you we gave one set of facts and to another an entirely different set of facts. In each case our aim was to teach you to use your mind. How are you, now, as graduates to profit by this intellectual development? Does a salesman or an under-official in a business concern or a housewife need intellect to be happy? Are we not merely educating the greater number of you to the end of breeding discontent? Has your cultural education been worth the candle?

The world has always been happier or more wholesome for education. Real depth of happiness in life can be obtained only by keen appreciation of the quality of life. It is hoped

that during your four years you have acquired a degree of appreciation of the quality of life which approaches a refinement. Is this connoisseurship in literature or music or art? Is it a lesser fear of beauty and a love for aesthetics that you have obtained? Do you understand the finer points of logic? Do you not feel something of a joy in knowing some portion of knowledge well? A national culture is to be judged in no small part by a people's use of their leisure time. The dollars and cents value of a college education fades into insignificance in comparison to the value of the leisure time--essentially the time when one is spending money rather than earning it. Many of you will earn your living through means which do not represent a calling and whose pursuit is not a high enthusiasm. Life for that larger group will be worth while only in so far as they make intelligent use of their leisure time by this very appreciation with which we hope we have equipped you. If we have, by our training, given you a discriminating perspective of the quality of life, we have to a large degree succeeded.

More than this, your training should have brought you to a point where you can erect for yourself a philosophy of life--a design for living. The concept of morals which you pursue sincerely must in the ultimate be an individual one. Many of you received early religious training. To what extent does your idea of godhead, or right and wrong, coincide with your early religious experience? I hope very little, for these matters should be decided by the individual rather than through



group training. True belief in a religious philosophy or a moral system must, if it is to mean anything, be a deep conviction and deep convictions are always the result of quite personal thinking. If this university has not maintained an organized chapel, it has, in my mind, done something of great significance in your religious development. It has taught you to think. You should have by this time developed your own concept of a godhead, your own interpretation of the creeds and have worked these ideas into the social scheme of things. You are not a weaker unit because you have an individual conception of a life philosophy. On the contrary you add to the sum total of good in this world because your convictions being personal are deeper. Intellectuality gives greater capacity for practical religion. The definition of religion which relegates it to the purely emotional is, to my mind, medieval. A prime function of religion is to develop a moral system. In our modern complicated world such a system must be rational--a product of the intellect.

More than this, your intellectuality is to be strained to the utmost in your understanding of our now complicated public life. Though, it is true, a first stage in understanding present-day national politics is a thorough knowledge of the alphabet, nevertheless the hope, and indeed the only hope, of a successful democracy is education. The failure of democracy as practiced in the United States is that an intelligence and idealism is postulated for all. The failure of higher education to take its part in the democratic scheme of

things is that it is not universal. Each one is a better citizen for having gone to college and the shame is that not all have had the same opportunity. Also if democracy is to be maintained as against fascism or communism it must be through the maintenance of individualism. Individualism is preserved through the creative instinct and through intellectual development for the masses.

These manners in which you will be called upon to use this intellectual development which is the result of the last four years are of slight importance before the greater question which seems surely to be an immediate challenge. This is the question of war and peace. Most of you are too young to have experienced war group psychology. I am not. I went into the World War a young idealist. I threw myself into the struggle with an eagerness which represented too largely an emotional sense of duty. There is, unfortunately, scant possibility that idealism can outlast a campaign. Too often a single engagement points out the futility of the slaughter of war. I supposed that I knew well the principles for which I fought. A sense of humanity, the rape of Belgium, the sinking of the Lusitania made me eager and proud to participate. If my idealism received a shock during my duty in France, the actual need of there ever having been a war is now under suspicion. I am, today, as regards war a cynic. It will be difficult to fool me again.

You have an advantage over me. The modern college training in history and international relations and the clear



out acknowledgment of the treachery of propaganda leaves you better prepared to weigh values. But in spite of the education you have received; in spite of the ability which is now yours to be critical of propaganda, it would not be difficult to take many of you to war. The old, time-honored devices for developing war psychology will be used again and effectively. Brass bands, uniforms, hero worship, the terrible atrocities of the enemy, the high value youth places upon idealism will all be paraded before you.

I am, after my war experience, an ardent pacifist--if something of a preparedist. If I am an idealist, I am also a realist. Wars will exist and in some wars we must perhaps fight. Defense is justified. But the justification for a war on the part of the United States will not be so simple as direct invasion of our land. It is more likely to involve a question of humanity in the international sense, to involve capitalistic imperialism or to be the result of diplomatic blundering. The propaganda which will direct your sentiments will be built up insidiously. Many of you will arrive at the point of belligerency without knowing the way by which you came. Here, however, it is hoped that your powers of reasoning will serve you. You will be called upon to analyse war propaganda as well as to resist the hysteria of the moment. Such will demand your cold and searching intelligence. Do not be misled. War is not glorious. The idea is un-Christian and unintelligent. Once at war, if your idealism outlives the period of training, it will not outlive the troop

ship. Moreover, it is not you who will profit in war. Both your ideals and your economic position will suffer. In the past, men fought for the personal aggrandisement of their leader. Today, though the purposes are less blatant and there is a camouflage of slaughter behind a blind of nationalism, it is the capitalistic leaders who profit.

It is in this sense of nationalism that lies the true danger. Nationalism is not a native instinct in peoples. There is no geographic, economic or provincial definition of nationalism. It is something superimposed from above, an artificial binding. We are taught national arrogance from the first grade. Whole educational systems are arranged to stifle internationalism--the only hope of world peace. Remember this, the great characters of the world war and the most fearless leaders were not the generals but the internationalists, such as Cardinal Mercier and Jane Adams. It takes both fearlessness and intelligence to have a sense of the brotherhood of man. The spirituality of such a stand is not a God-sent virtue but the product of deep thinking, a product of the intellect with which we hope we have inspired you. In the minds of many people, and particularly so in the case of patriotic societies, internationalism is treason, even though it was a doctrine of Jesus. The virtues of patriotism are so much easier to see than the faults of patriotism which come from over emphasis. Dangers arise in the introduction of national ideals by a system of regimentation. We are always applauding youth movements, particularly



those semi-military organizations. We so seldom applaud education of the individual which tends to resist regimentation. The world is not yet ready to give up crucifixions. We are so easily regimented that let war clouds approach and the mob will kill or cow any who speaks for peace. It is only by instilling into the minds of greater and greater numbers the processes of individual thinking that we can have mass action, as in times of war, that is intelligent and humane.

There may be some who, as students, feel that we have failed to provide the intellectual equipment by which to meet these problems. Too many of our courses may have been factual and too few philosophical. Of course, the completion of each course cannot leave all students with an intellectual advancement. One student finds progress of the mind in one subject and another student in yet another subject. More than this, we are under-manned. There has been--and I suppose always will be--too much education in crowded class rooms. But here I must also scrutinize our system of teaching to see if the fault is not ours. In part it is our fault. The security of tenure of the professorial office is necessary for the protection of scholarly life. And yet, therein lies a danger. Secure in their position there are teachers who need the incentive of continual competition. But there is a greater possibility of fault than that. This is the system of selection and advancement of instructors. The usual procedure of selection of new members of the staff is on the basis of scholarship and research. This is worthy and right so far as it goes. There are departments, however, which base their

reputation to a great degree upon their productive scholarship, that is, minutia of research published each year by their members. I do not depreciate this scholarship in the least. I am ambitious in that regard myself. But I do regret that so slight attention is paid to success in teaching. Few departmental meetings discuss that subject which is of such prime importance to you, the psychology of education. Too often we prize the teacher who makes a course hard for the student, and too often we have scorn for the teacher who by the cleverness of his methods makes learning easy. A professor must take care not to be too popular with the students lest he earn the scorn of his colleague who is the pure scholar. Outstanding among the departments which make applied methodology of first importance is one with which few of you have had contact. This is the Department of the University School where most brilliant results in intellectual development in students are being accomplished.

Is instruction on the college and university level keeping pace with the progress achieved in secondary schools? There are a few notable examples of colleges truly progressive. Most movements in liberating the old education consist of a change in student study habits--with no revolution in teaching methods. In the social sciences and the humanities where pedagogical procedures are the least satisfactory, little is done to rectify the old historical approach which so pleases the pedant but means so little to the student. We need a revolution in methodology. To accomplish this we shall have to put



aside the dignity ex cathedra and take the student into our confidence. As a group, we scholars are too convinced of our own importance and we appreciate too little that the real university is a collection of students, not teachers.

Has our instruction, old fashioned or progressive, succeeded with you personally? Have you merely passed the requisite number of courses or have you been equipped with the ability to think? We do not know. You may or may not know. If we have not instilled in you the intellectual processes you probably are not capable of even judging your personal progress. It is possible that we have done you harm. The mass of freshmen are eager and open-minded. Few seniors are. Does this complacency of the upper classmen mean that we have equipped you with an intellectual smugness? If so, your faculty blindly but surely sins. The test comes when you consider your history, chemistry, economics, or what you will, and challenge what mental progress you made while pursuing these studies. If they have started either a line of thought or a method of thought that is to continue, then they were worth while. But if on graduating you feel that one group of methods of thinking is to cease and another commence, then your university or you or both have miserably failed. I wish that I knew your answers. They would be tremendously interesting.

Why do I tell you all this? Why, as you are leaving, do I point out faults in our system? I do so because a university is as great as the sincerity of its students, the learning of its faculty, and the interest of the third academic estate--

the alumni. You are about to enter that last group. Your responsibility to the university does not now end, but in a new and enlarged sense goes on. You have from this day fresh powers. You can and should continue influencing your university. There is in my mind great virtue in the Harvard scheme whereby alumni committees were created to consult with and to inspire the various departments. These committees have had great influence. Whether we ever develop so formal a plan or not, I believe that you should keep touch with the department of your special interest. You will find the faculty tremendously interested in graduate opinion, especially when given by men qualified in the line of thought of the department, and it is possible you will help us to rectify our faults.

And lastly I have another responsibility for you. I highly recommend for you the following action: As graduates of this university I charge you with the task and pleasure of exiling to some tropical island, some Devil's Island of the jungle, any professor who gives a commencement address longer than this one.